



**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY**  
**MIKE STRAIN DVM, COMMISSIONER**

Louisiana Specialty Crop Program  
Final Performance Report  
Agreement # 12-25-B-0926  
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**CONTENTS**

---

Program Overview .....	2
LA Super Plants .....	2
LA Strawberry Industry Consumer Awareness .....	10
Specialty Crop Educational Program for Vulnerable Kids.....	14
Banana Crop Diversification Project .....	20
Consumer Awareness Campaign to Promote Buying Fresh Local Specialty Crop Produce.....	25

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## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

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The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) was awarded \$338,982.59 in funding for the FY2009 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP). LDAF implemented projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops throughout the state.

Louisiana's projects focused on programs working to inform consumers of the availability of Louisiana specialty crops, specific promotions of the Louisiana strawberry industry, increasing consumer awareness of Louisiana's horticulture industry, increasing child nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops and diversifying Louisiana's specialty crop production to help add money into the local economy while providing greater food access in the underserved area of New Orleans. LDAF projects were designed to improve the competitiveness of Louisiana's specialty crops and capitalize on the growing demand for local foods and freshness.

LDAF staff monitored each project by requiring quarterly activity reports and maintaining periodic phone call and email update discussions. All invoicing and grant fund payments were completed. All funding has been expended.

## **A GREEN INDUSTRY CONSUMER AWARENESS PLANT PROMOTION PROGRAM: LOUISIANA SUPER PLANTS**

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### **Project Summary**

This project focused on promotion activities necessary to generate interest in landscaping, entice consumers to garden, and increase traffic flow through retail operations. The Louisiana Nursery and Landscape Association identified plant trial evaluation, introduction, and promotion as the top priority of its members. Promotion is essential to keep the buying public excited about gardening and landscaping and thus increase sales.

Marketing programs that highlight specific plants have been very successful in generating increased sales. Traditionally, these marketing programs have been regional and national in scope and developed and directed by private companies. Often, plants promoted through these private programs are not suited to Louisiana's hot, humid growing conditions.

Development of a marketing program specific to Louisiana and available to all producers and retailers benefits the Louisiana's Nursery & Landscape Industry. Marketing programs need to be based on university research to provide accurate plant selection for the state. State-based marketing programs are locally effective in increasing brand recognition and increasing sales of these plants.

### **Project Approach**

*Selection of Program Name and Logo Design.* The importance of having a simple, yet easily identified and recognized symbols of the program was considered critical to the committee of communication and horticulture specialists who worked together to select and design the logo. *Louisiana Super Plants* was selected as program name. Logo is displayed below.

*Selection of Louisiana Super Plants.* The Louisiana Super Plants Advisory Committee comprised of research and extension personnel, growers, landscapers, and retailers meet annually to advise on which plants are notable for selection as Louisiana Super Plants. Initial plant selection is based on university research from the trial gardens at the LSU AgCenter's Hammond Research Station.

*Introducing Program to Nursery & Landscape Industry.* Various methods were used to connect with and introduce the *Louisiana Super Plants* program to the nursery and landscape industry. Program information and a sign-up sheet were mailed to 550 retail and wholesale nursery businesses in Louisiana.

Presentations (over 65) were made at every professional grower association meeting in the state (including Louisiana Nursery & Landscape Association annual meeting and several board meetings) to introduce the program to nursery and landscape professionals.

Louisiana Super Plant booths (over 35) were manned at every state association tradeshow and at the Gulf States Horticulture Expo in Mobile, Alabama and Texas Horticulture Expo in Houston, Texas in 2010, 2011, and 2012.

Presentations were made at workshops held for professional horticulturists including Pest Management Workshop, Plant Materials Conference, and Mid South Growers Conference in 2011 and 2012.



Emails

Louisiana Super Plants E-Mail Updates were sent to participants about every two weeks indicating promotion times, encouraging use of POP materials, naming future super plants, and other useful information



*Introducing Program to Consumers.* Information and promotional materials were sent to all extension agents and master gardener coordinators in the state. Over 300 presentations were made across the state to garden clubs, master gardener groups, homeowners, and civic organizations.

The extensive communication resources of the LSU AgCenter’s *Get It Growing* were utilized to introduce the program to consumers in a state-wide promotion package including web (daily), print (weekly), radio (Monday – Friday), and TV (weekly). Radio spots (Monday-Friday) were sent to 70 stations throughout Louisiana. Seven TV stations and 34 newspapers use *Get It Growing* TV spots and columns. All major markets in Louisiana (New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, Lafayette, Alexandria, Monroe and Shreveport) were reached.

These media resources were also utilized to promote the plants during the spring and fall each year. Below are examples of TV and radio spots and news article on Louisiana Super Plants that were distributed.

TV Spot

**Swan columbine is tough, colorful Super Plant**

(Video 11/21/11) The saying goes, “out of sight, out of mind.” That slogan could apply to the obscure columbine. Not many Louisiana gardeners have ever heard of it. Until now. LSU AgCenter horticulturist Dan Gill explains why the Swan columbine is a great Louisiana Super Plant worthy of the spotlight. (Runtime: 1:30)

Radio Spot

**Super Plant Penny Mac hydrangea reblooms throughout summer**

(Video 05/21/12) In Louisiana, hydrangeas typically bloom once – in May. But the Super Plant Penny Mac hydrangea keeps reblooming many times until the end of summer. On this edition of *Get It Growing*, LSU AgCenter horticulturist Dan Gill visits the Hammond

Research Station and looks at the Penny Mac hydrangea – a reliable and beautiful plant for Louisiana landscapes. (Runtime: 1:40)

News Article

[Serena angelonia named spring Louisiana Super Plant](#)

(For Release On Or After 04/15/11) An outstanding angelonia has been named a spring 2011 Louisiana Super Plant selection. Serena series angelonia is a long-blooming summer bedding plant with a tough constitution and a long blooming season.

Web site

Louisiana Super Plant web site was developed in fall 2010. News, plant information, and a list of retailers are published on website.



Print Advertisement (photo right)

Louisiana Super Plants ads were designed and appeared 4 times a year in the *Louisiana Gardener* magazine and various newspapers throughout the state.



*Point of Purchase Material Developed*

Material was designed and provided to retailers and wholesalers to promote purchases of Louisiana Super Plants.

The materials were meant to encourage sales by indentifying the plants as Louisiana Super Plants and to provide information about the plants to consumers and landscape horticulturists.

POP materials included logo signs (below left), bench cards (below right), and pot tags (bottom center). These photos are from actual retail/wholesale displays.



### Billboard

Louisiana Super Plants billboard (below) was designed and appeared in 13 locations throughout state during the month of April 2011 and 2012.



### Push Cards

Over 15,000 push cards were distributed to extension agents, Master Gardeners, garden clubs, Rotary, Kiwanis and other civic/gardening associations and at spring garden shows in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Hammond, Covington, Houma, Forest Hill, Lake Charles, and Natchitoches during 2010 and 2011.



Informational Flyers

Over 20,000 flyers describing the Louisiana Super Plants were distributed retail/wholesale participants, extension agents, Master Gardeners, garden clubs, Rotary, Kiwanis and other civic/gardening associations and at spring garden shows in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Hammond, Covington, Houma, Forest Hill, Lake Charles, and Natchitoches during 2011 and 2012.



*Trial Gardens at Hammond Research Station*

Louisiana Super Plants trial gardens were established at the LSU AgCenter's Hammond Research Station in fall 2010. These gardens provide valuable evaluations of potential Louisiana Super Plants. With slightly less than 2 meetings a week being held at the station, these gardens also are visual and tactile billboards for promoting Louisiana Super Plants.



### **Goals and Outcomes Achieved**

Over 200 retail/grower operations signed up to participate in the Louisiana Super Plants program.

Informal survey conducted after first season (fall 2010) of introducing Louisiana Super Plants indicated

- sales of Amazon Dianthus at one wholesale nursery were 145% over last year.
- a retail garden center had a 1920% increase in Camelot foxglove sales.
- Shishi Gashira camellia sales at a wholesale grower were up by 45%.

A more extensive survey was conducted during the summer 2012. Retail and wholesale businesses participating in the Louisiana Super Plants program were contacted by email. There was a 15% response rate. Of the participants who responded 40% described his business as retail, 40% as wholesale, none as landscape design, and 20% as landscape installation/maintenance.

Eighty percent of the respondents said the LSP program had a positive effect on their business. Fifty percent of the respondents said sales or use of LSP in their business increased from 21-40% after the promotion began, the other 50% indicated increased sales of less than 20%.

The survey indicated that not only did the program increase sales of Louisiana Super Plants, but overall sales or use in the business was increased. Over 60% said the LSP program increased traffic flow or interest in their business. All the respondents indicated that the LSP program increased overall sales in their business ranging from 10 – 60%.

Eighty five percent of the respondents felt the Louisiana Super Plants program had been beneficial to the Nursery and Landscape Industry.

When asked to ‘name the Louisiana Super Plant that had the greatest impact on sales in your businesses, one respondent wrote “no one plant, but an increase in general plant knowledge and interest.”



Don't get caught  
with your plants down!

Participate in the  
Louisiana Super Plants program.

## **Beneficiaries**

This program has impacted a large part of the Nursery and Landscape Industry in Louisiana, which employs over 56,000 individuals and contributes over \$2.2 billion annually to the Louisiana economy. The nursery and landscape industry includes wholesale producers, retailers, landscape contractors, landscape architects (designers), horticulture maintenance firms, arborists and golf courses. Commercial ornamental horticulture is the largest specialty crop industry in Louisiana.

## **Lessons Learned**

Based on the survey and comments from participants, the Louisiana Super Plants program is a marketing success.

Excellent industry cooperation in planning and developing the program is critical for industry buy-in and participation. This was extremely helpful. We learned that the industry preferred the big round signs and bench cards in their promotion efforts. They had also requested plant tags but determined that method was time consuming and labor intensive for limited staff operations. The other promotional methods worked successfully and recommended that any future dollars could be better spent on purchasing more of the large signs and bench cards.

Being able to utilize the extensive communication resources of the LSU AgCenter provided a low cost, established, and very effective method of communicating with consumers.

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## **LOUISIANA STRAWBERRY INDUSTRY CONSUMER AWARENESS PROGRAM**

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### **Project Summary**

The purpose of this project was to develop and conduct an educational marketing campaign. The campaign consisted of ads running in three different magazines, a magazine website, and e-newsletters that were distributed throughout Louisiana and available worldwide through the internet. This campaign provided promotion and increased public awareness of the nutritional qualities of Louisiana strawberries during the peak strawberry harvest season of January through April, 2011.

Louisiana's strawberry harvest has decreased over the last few years due to freezing weather conditions. The intention of the project is for the public to be made aware that Louisiana producers have reinvested in their crops and produce quality strawberries for harvest. This

campaign focused on informing the consumer that strawberries are once again growing, available and nutritionally beneficial.

### **Project Approach**

In December of 2010 and January of 2011 meetings were scheduled with magazine companies, publication deadlines were met and ads ran according to schedule. The ads reached across Louisiana and into connecting states with ads targeting consumers to buy Louisiana strawberries and educating consumers on the nutritional benefits of eating Louisiana strawberries by directing them to our website- [www.louisianastrawberries.com](http://www.louisianastrawberries.com).

In February 2011 ads ran in Country Roads Magazine, a website ad and e-newsletter ad with Country Roads Magazine. In March 2011 ads ran in Louisiana Cookin' Magazine, a website ad and e-newsletter ad with Country Roads Magazine. In April 2011 ads ran in Louisiana Cookin' Magazine, Taste of the South Magazine, a website ad and e-newsletter ad with Country Roads Magazine.

Country Roads Magazine had a total of 30,000 copies distributed including location deliveries and mailed subscriptions. The online ads that were placed received a total viewing of 78,409. Taste of the South Magazine has an average of 100,000 paid copies per issue. Louisiana Cookin' Magazine has on an average 12,500 subscribers in 45 states and newsstand presence in all 50 states, with 75% of their readers living within 600 miles of Louisiana.

Board members, advertising companies and board director successfully worked diligently together on getting the ads presented and completed in a timely fashion for advertising deadlines.

### **Goals and Outcomes Achieved**

The goals of this project were to educate the consumer on the benefits and nutritional value of strawberries, while enjoying the fresh, great taste, in addition to the healthful benefits of consuming strawberries, thereby increasing sales of Louisiana strawberries.

The goals that were set for the project were achieved by the ads running in the magazines, website and e-newsletters. We had delays in getting the website functioning and getting the necessary reports for the beginning of the project. The problem was fixed by staying in contact with the webmaster and the project remained on target. The ads ran on schedule, reaching consumers throughout the harvest season, January through April 2011.

The expected measurable outcome of the increased number of “hits” on the website exceeded the goal of 20%. The website visits prior to the start of this campaign were 475 for a one year timeframe. Due to unforeseen circumstances, numbers are not available for January 2011 or February 2011. But March 2011 had a total number of 3,017 visits, April 2011 had 2,081 visits, May 2011 had 273 visits and June 2011 had 771 visits.

Goals were surpassed significantly by the number of visitors to the Louisiana Strawberry Marketing Board website. In the month of March alone we increased hits by 157%.

### **Beneficiaries**

Those who benefited from this project were both the general public and Louisiana strawberry producers. The campaign increased public awareness of the nutritional value of strawberries, while enjoying the fresh, great taste, in addition to the healthful benefits, being one of the healthiest fruits to eat, being low in calories, naturally high in fiber, vitamin C, potassium and antioxidants. They are also fat and sodium free. The enhanced awareness increased purchases and consumption of Louisiana strawberries. In a small sampling survey of some of the larger strawberry producers in Louisiana each expressed an increase in sales during peak pricing months coinciding with the promotional efforts timeframe.

### **Lessons Learned**

We learned that even the best thought out plans still come with unexpected delays. Keep in mind that timelines may need to be changed depending on weather conditions and harvesting dates. Make sure your advertising vendors are aware that dates reserved may need to be adjusted. Also, digital advertising and social media are a much faster way to reach a large amount of people. In future projects we will include more funding dedicated to social media.

### **Additional Information**

Louisiana Cookin' Magazine Ad



Taste of the South Magazine Ad



Country Roads Magazine Website & E-newsletter Ad



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## **SPECIALTY CROP EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR VULNERABLE KIDS**

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### **Project Summary**

The purpose of the Specialty Crop Education Program for Vulnerable Children was to increase food knowledge for 500 grade school students attending schools in New Orleans where at least 50% plus one of the student body participates in the USDA free and reduced meals. We utilize participation in these programs as the proxy to indicate our selection for schools serving vulnerable children. Our experience, plus initial findings from farmers' market research in Vermont, points to the importance of kids' tactile learning in food education. When children meet the farmer and taste his/her products, they take the knowledge with them forward when they make future decisions about what to eat. In this project we focused our concern on the low levels of consumer knowledge about what products are available from local farmers, in particular the fate of vulnerable consumers: Children who consume very low levels of fresh foods, live in households that purchase and prepare fruits and vegetables, and who possess under developed taste buds for these healthy products. As part of our campaign to combat childhood obesity, we see it important to grow the next generation of good eaters. This project worked to educate these young consumers to increase the likelihood that the children will grow up to develop a healthier relationship to food, consume more fresh foods, and become the future consumers for the community of local farmers who are redirecting their businesses towards the direct marketing of specialty crops in the Greater New Orleans region.

The motivation for the project is consistent with a long-term commitment to increasing food access for vulnerable families. It is especially important that we inject into the strategies the building blocks of healthy appetites: an intimate and tactile relationship to food. It is not enough to provide access if the kids have no desire to consume fresh fruits and vegetables. Where does this desire come from? We believe that it is through direct contact with farmers and food, reinforced by curricula that places food choices into a meaningful context. We selected schools with a) a holistic commitment to food choices as essential components of children's education (i.e., Edible Schoolyard), b) new interventions that integrate food and fitness choices into existing curricula (i.e., Links curriculum to combat childhood obesity among African-American youth), and c) schools that are located near one of the market locations.



## **Project Approach**

- We conducted in-classroom specialty crop lesson plans designed to capture baseline food knowledge, prepare children for Market visits, and to educate them about the connection between place, product and the people who grow specialty crops. Visiting 10 schools, we conducted pre-Strawberry Field Trip food knowledge evaluation lesson plans to 337 children. While most of the children were third graders, we also served kindergarten, first and second grades at Bethune, Craig, Banneker, Dibert, Good Shepherd, Green, Kipp Central City, and Schaumberg.
- We conducted Strawberry Field Trips on nearly every Tuesday in April and May, serving 373 students – 36 more than who we reached in the classroom.
- We distributed 373 invitations to visiting students to attend the summer Saturday Marketeer events with their parents and guardians. Attendees receive benefits: Children receive pass outs for their participation in the educational activities, and parents/guardians receive \$10 Market tokens each visit totaling \$30. This monetary incentive was not funded by this project. Families were also encouraged to sign their children up for membership to the Marketeer Club which garners each child \$5 in tokens on their birthday. This funding was also not derived by this project, but by other funding avenues.
- After the school year ended, we turned our attention to summer camps, some operated at schools where we already work. We conducted 5 different “Meet Me at the Market” days totaling 336 children. Unable to conduct camp visits first, we surveyed children on the three questions upon arriving to the Market.

Links, Inc. and Firstline Schools provided us with five confirmed classroom and Market visits. Links, Inc.’s three New Orleans chapters are already committed to battling childhood obesity. Part of their methodology is to broaden children’s healthy food choices. Farmers markets help them to meet their goal. As such, they are proving to be a strategic school partner. Meanwhile, Firstline Schools is a charter school organization that runs four schools. Among their schools is Samuel J. Green, host to the Edible Schoolyard of New Orleans. Firstline secured at least two of its schools to our project: Green and Dibert.

Meanwhile, the Louisiana Public Health Institute’s school-based health division helped us to refine our classroom expectations and narrow our school search. Similarly, its partners – Mahalia Jackson Early Childhood and Family Learning Center and Kingsley House —also introduced our staff to the Kipp Central City school and summer camps.



## **Goals and Outcomes Achieved**

- We selected 10 schools to conduct food environment education lessons based upon a set of criteria: within walking distance to the Tuesday Market and/or show some commitment to nutrition education/obesity prevention via ongoing programs. Please note: We conduct ongoing food education to more than 2,500 students per year, but in order to be included in this program, schools had to meet the 50% plus one free and reduced meal program participation.
- We conducted food knowledge assessment of 373 grade school students in New Orleans prior to Strawberry Field Trips to the Crescent City Farmers Market. We acquired baseline food knowledge by asking students three questions: Have you knowingly tasted a Louisiana strawberry? Have you met a farmer? Have you visited a farmers market?
- We conducted lesson plans in the classroom, in advance of Market visits.
- 373 students conducted field trips to the Market.
- 373 students received a sample pint of Louisiana strawberries and a voucher worth \$30 worth of produce upon returning to the Market with parents or guardians during summer educational activities.

We fell 127 short of our project goal of 500 vulnerable children during the school year; however, we reached another 336 children with the inclusion of summer camps serving vulnerable kids. These additional activities met all of the requirements of the funded project; however, with the end of the strawberry season our data collected per the 3 questions pertain to other specialty crops, most notably tomatoes and cucumbers. As a result, we consider those as a separate data set.

Our ultimate goal is behavioral change. We seek to alter consumer behavior among vulnerable families by introducing children to specialty crops in a structured learning environment of the classroom followed by field trips to the Farmers Market. During our narrow window of opportunity, we helped children to draw a connection between people, place and product. Our project is intended to stoke demand via children. As a result, our long term goal is for the kids who visit the Market, sample the specialty crops, meet the farmer, and influence their parents that subsequent visits to the Market should be made.

The challenge of reaching 500: Concerned that we may overload the Market with school children, many of whom had never visited the Market before, we determined it important to visit the kids in their classroom first. This two-step process slowed down our ability to reach our goal of 500 school children between April LEAP tests and the end of the school year. We served 373 by the end of the school year.

We remained committed to this goal of visiting children in their classroom first, and only accommodated school visits without classroom visits in a few instances. These included schools who had already visited the Market in the past.

The difficulty conducting exit interviews: Similarly, we decided not to conduct evaluations of the children upon departing from the Market after their educational experience. The chaos of many kids, the design of the learning experience, and the time devoted to the tasting of specialty crops made for little time to conduct an orderly exit interview or survey.

We conducted food knowledge assessment of 373 grade school students in New Orleans prior to the Strawberry Field Trips to the Farmers Market. We asked students three questions: Have you knowingly tasted a Louisiana strawberry? Have you met a farmer? Have you visited a farmers market?

The selected schools fit into four categories: 1) contains an obesity prevention program, 2) contains a school garden program, 3) is located within walking distance to the Market, and 4) has no current garden or nutrition program.

Of the 373 students, 24% of respondents had never tasted a Louisiana strawberry; 51% had never met a farmer; and 50% had never visited a farmers market. At the conclusion of the program, 100% of students had tasted Louisiana berries, met farmers and visited a farmers market.

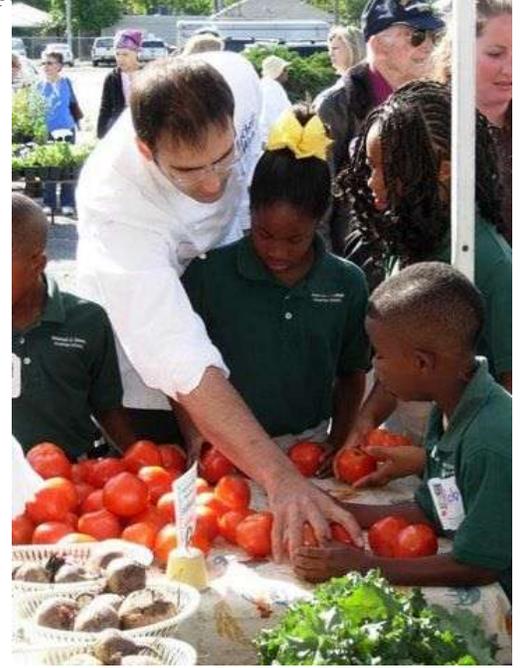
Of the 373 school kids who visited the Market as part of the Strawberry Field Trips, 12% of them returned to the Market during the summer with their parents and participated in summer learning activities.

Although we fell 127 short of our project goal for 500 vulnerable school children to taste specialty crops i.e., strawberries and learning about them through farmers market field trip visits during the school year, we continued reaching out to another 336 children with the inclusion of summer camps serving vulnerable kids. This resulted in a total of 709 children reached ultimately surpassing our goal of 500. We reached 10 schools surpassing our goal of reaching 3-5 schools. Since additional children were reached during summer visits they were not calculated in our goal of measuring returning visits from school field trips. However, 12% returned to the market and purchased specialty crops. We consider this a very positive result.

### **Beneficiaries**

Links Incorporated is a women's civic engagement organization committed to providing three Orleans Parish schools with its obesity prevention curriculum. Our partnership contributed to their achieving the goal of altering children's relationship to food. Similarly, our program added value to the other schools committed to enhancing children's education with tactile learning delivered through tactile learning via specialty crop tasting using all five senses, experimental map skills, critical thinking via in-Market scavenger hunts, and public speaking upon reporting back to the group: Edible Schoolyard of First Line Schools, Kipp, and others. Similarly, specialty crop farmers benefited from the increased direct sales to new consumers. The students, teachers, chaperones, partners, and parents together learned and shopped.

Of the 373 students who were part of the spring Strawberry Field Trips 12% returned to the Market. With 12% of the kids returning with their parents during the summer, this means that 45 families returned and spent dollars at the Market. Since the other children reached was due to summer outreach we didn't include them in the above returning statistics, but due to the activities of this project a total of 709 children directly benefited from the education outreach. Students' parents and other family members were also exposed to the educational message presented on specialty crop consumption, as well as school and summer camp staff. Specialty crop producers selling at the market were also beneficiaries of this project by increased sales due to new consumers attending and purchasing at the market.



### **Lessons Learned**

Overall, we are very pleased with the outcomes and lessons learned from this project. We were initially hesitant to saddle up with schools. Aware of how much pressure schools are under to improve test scores, our concern was that they would be less than enthusiastic partners for nontraditional education programming. To our surprise, we did not encounter barriers for cooperation. For instance, they did not balk at shouldering the cost of bus travel. They were excited to bring the kids to a healthy environment home to healthy activity: commerce, different ages, healthy foods, etc. As we consider future school partnerships with schools, we will consider the following:

- Our map skills (geography) lesson — linking the actual parishes from whence the food has come — was too complicated for Third Graders. There are perhaps some schools whose third graders may be ready to explore the region at that level; however, future lessons will drill down to simpler concepts about food sources. Rather than discuss places in terms of specific parishes, we will explore the food sources. For instance, satsumas: Do they grow above ground? In trees? Below ground like carrots? Etc.
- For spring semester classroom and Market lessons, the time of year we selected works well. During the standardized (LEAP) testing, it is helpful to get kids not participating in LEAP out of the school. Moreover, after the tests, there is little actual content left in the school year. As a result, teachers are hungry to find other types of learning activities for the kids. Farmers markets are ideal for the last six-weeks of school.
- For the autumn semester, we are not yet certain as to whether similar *convenient* times exist. We have tagged November and December as Market-friendly months with the arrival of citrus to the Market – as a kid-friendly fruit.

- The role of partners: While not all of the schools we selected boast nutrition and/or edible education curricula, we did find a correlation between the schools that have made a programmatic commitment to teaching youth healthy eating habits and their food knowledge. In general, we found those schools to be more receptive to our project. Whether we would make this a requirement for participation in our project in the future, this has yet to be determined. Needless to say, we will continue to look for strong partners.
- The challenge of energetic kids: It is difficult to match the expectations of young children out on a field trip and the business context and needs of farmers markets. The kids are eager to get out, walk around, act up, etc. It is only natural. In general, the larger the group, the



more disruptive to the Market. The kids were, by and large, well behaved. In future projects, we will consider implementing some sort of fitness component into the field trip. This would lengthen the field trip, something that is helpful to the school, and provide some teachable moments for the kids that fitness and good eating are related.

- Giving kids important materials to deliver to parents: We relied upon the kids to hand-deliver important materials to their parents. Twelve percent returned to the Market. That is a good percentage. We placed the said materials in an important-looking, handled paper sack filled with complimentary pints of strawberries. This may not have been clear enough to the kids.
- As a result of this project, some of the less organized schools began to contact us to schedule visits. This was a welcome surprise.

• Another is the enthusiasm among farmers. As with FMNP season, we have found farmers to grow increasingly interested in their role as messengers for healthy eating. Not only are they making more money by diversifying their customer bases, but they are also joining in and in many cases leading the discussion about the paths to healthier lives – eating more fresh, healthy and local fruits and vegetables. We found that vendors appreciated the attention and detail that went into the design of the Strawberry Field Trips, thus minimizing negative effects of the parade of kids in the Market upon their gross sales; and they enjoyed their role as food leaders and experts.

We are largely pleased with the outcomes of this new, expansive specialty crop education that utilizes the discrete teachable moments of the classroom combined with that of touring a farmers market and learning about the farmer and direct purchasing from them. As we inch

closer to continuing the program with some programmatic changes in 2011-12, some of the lessons learned are as follows:

Conduct weekly Saturday Market Marketeer activities to continue taste education of specialty crops.

In recognition of the tight timeline for the project after LEAP testing but before the end of the school year, we were grateful that we could add value to summer camps serving vulnerable kids by extending the program to them. However, next time we will make the following changes to improve the program's effectiveness and ultimate replication:

Improve the baseline data collection to 3 questions posed using multiple choice and/or images for those grades too young to handle reading on their own.

Simplify the geography lesson. We found that the discussion of parishes too advanced for third graders. And worse, once schools liked the program and booked a bus for a tour, they often added other classes into the Market field trip. This meant that we were often managing kids too young for our curriculum. As such, in the future we will expect surprises and redesign the teach modules to meet different grade levels.

We had planned to give \$5 tokens (through another funding source) to the students to observe purchasing habits. It was soon learned that this proved to be chaotic with limited number of chaperons and also a few students were observed trying to get money for the tokens. We decided it would be better to purchase on behalf of the students.

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## **BANANA CROP DIVERSIFICATION PROJECT**

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### **Project Summary**

The purpose of this project was to demonstrate the viability of growing and selling bananas at farmers markets during the otherwise lean months of August and September. We provided training and cost-share starter plants of bananas to seven farmers who participate at the Crescent City Farmers Market. This is especially crucial to farmers markets since August and September are peak months at the market and we see increased seniors due to the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. Unfortunately, the variety of available products during this stretch is lean. Upon greeting first-time seniors to the Market, we are often forced to explain that "Yes, we have no bananas." Indeed, many seniors are instructed to consume bananas when taking certain medicines. More familiar with grocery stores, they expect to see bananas at farmers markets. While our subtropical climate allows bananas to be grown, winter temperatures indeed make this tricky. There are no current examples of large scale

commercial banana production. We believe niche production targeting direct sales to market customers would satisfy seniors with FMNP vouchers, families beginning the school year in search of fruits, and farmers keen to extend their presence at farmers markets with profitable products during the “slow” months. In addition to the training, we conducted radio promotions, displayed signage and staged tastings.

### **Project Approach**

We selected an agronomist to research banana varieties. Organic farmer Lester L’Hoste conducted research of banana varieties best suited to our coastal Louisiana environment together with our banana plant source Glenn Stokes of New Iberia, LA’s Stokes Tropicals.

We assembled, printed and distributed educational materials for banana farmers. They include copies of the book, *Bananas You Can Grow*, and materials from the University of Georgia AgCenter.

We purchased starter plants in December 2011. We purchased 180 plants from Stokes Tropicals. Of the 180 plants purchased, 76 plants that weren’t initially planted were used for replacement plantings which were required due to trees lost in drought and Hurricane Isaac. Varieties include Orinoco, Pitogo, Raja Puri, Mysore, Ice Cream, Goldfinger and Dwarf Cavendish.

We conducted two workshops for participating farmers. In April and August 2012, we distributed materials and provided one-on-one technical expertise for farmers to plant, harvest and handle post-harvest of banana fruit. Farmer Lester L’Hoste (in person), horticulturalist Glenn Stokes (via telephone), and Market Umbrella staff (during site visits) conducted the workshops. We had not anticipated that the additional site visit workshop would be necessary; however, the unexpected drought of 2012 required us to visit farms, monitor the effects of drought, and provide guidance as to how best to mitigate its effects upon the 2012 yield.

Farmers planted banana groves. Seven Louisiana farmers planted 180 banana plants in 2012. Of these, 76 were replanted after drought resulted in losses. It cannot be overstated how much drought caused havoc with a plant that otherwise tolerates extreme warm conditions. Had we anticipated that the winter of 2012 would have been so warm, we could have risked earlier planting dates. In our subtropical climate, margin of error can be catastrophic for high-risk (yet also high-yield) crops. The Seven (7) growers who paid for, picked up and planted banana trees are L’Hoste Citrus in Plaquemines Parish, Vintage Garden in St. Bernard Parish, Johndale Farm in Tangipahoa Parish, Bayou Farm in Evangeline Parish, Grow Dat Youth Farm, Langston Hughes Academy and Rebecca Green in Orleans Parish.

We wrote and published marketing materials for consumers. Our goal was for farmers to deliver fresh bananas for purchase at the Crescent City Farmers Market in August 2012. When drought and Hurricane Issac conditions caused a delay in harvests, resulting in fruiting after the originally proposed grant timeline, we selected August 2012’s National Farmers

Market Week to communicate to consumers about the forthcoming arrival of banana fruit, information about growing backyard banana trees, recipes, and photographs of Louisiana banana orchards. This yielded local newspaper coverage — [http://www.nola.com/food/index.ssf/2012/08/local\\_and\\_tastier\\_bananas\\_are.html](http://www.nola.com/food/index.ssf/2012/08/local_and_tastier_bananas_are.html) — in addition to the 4,200 subscribers to our weekly electronic newsletter and 4,401 Facebook friends. At market, we distributed 200 paper growing guides to consumers.

We monitored product growth during June, July and August site visits. Photographs of site visits are included in this report.

We wrote and booked radio spots promoting the forthcoming fruits of our banana labor. In July 2012, five radio spots ran each day on WWOZ 90.7 FM.

Conduct workshop 2: Post-harvest and marketing (August 2012 & future). Because of schedule conflict challenges and those created by the distance between growers, marketing technical assistance was and will continue to be given on a one-on-one basis outside the time of this grant. Since drought and Hurricane Isaac delayed harvest, the same will apply to post-harvest technical assistance.

We conducted radio/print promotions during July/August 2012. Beginning Sunday, July 29, five spots a day ran on WWOZ 90.7 FM to promote our banana event at the downtown location of our Crescent City Farmers Market. Two spots ran on the morning of the day of the event. 500 postcards were distributed at all three locations of our Crescent City Farmers Market in the weeks leading up to the event.

We staged a banana event at market in August 2012. The Saturday, August 4, 2012, event promoted our Specialty Crop Education Program for Banana Diversification project. One of the new banana growers, Heather Robertson, of Johndale Farm in Tangipahoa Parish was present to answer consumer questions about her new banana plants. Captioned photographs of the other growing sites were displayed. Marketumbrella.org staff fielded questions about the project. Banana coloring sheets for kids were offered. Tastes of banana paletas made by one of our Crescent City Farmers Market vendors were distributed. And copies of Glenn Stokes' (who we purchased the banana plants from and who served as one of our local banana growing experts) book *Bananas You Can Grow*, were given.

In our project plan we proposed to pay 50% of the starter plants cost; however, the cost of each plant was less than we anticipated. We chose to use the cost savings to fund the replenishing of plants lost to Hurricane Isaac. This was done to insure the continuation of the project and viability of farmer participation .

We were unable to conduct farmer surveys to determine fruit yield due to delays experienced in planting and due to plant damage realized by Hurricane Isaac. Surveys to determine yield will be conducted after the end of the grant period in 2013. We are committed to this project and even though we faced delays and the grant period has ended we will continue to support the farmers and measure project results long after the ending of this grant.

Stokes Tropicals was an invaluable partner, thus providing expertise in selecting varieties to plant, services to “winter” the plants in warmer climates, delivery, and horticultural tips: planting, harvest and post-harvest. Farmer Lester L’Hoste was able to help translate Stokes’ expertise into the scale relevant to conventional row crop farmers.

**Goals and Outcomes Achieved**

The project had several goals. The first was to recruit and train six farmers to participate in the Banana Diversification project to expand their production of specialty crops for sale during low production months in Louisiana. This goal was achieved and surpassed. We were able to secure seven farmers.

The second goal was to increase production of bananas in coastal Louisiana for commercial sales. This goal was achieved. One hundred percent of the seven farmers that participated in the project have productive plant growth and fruit are visibly growing. Before this project the baseline was zero.

The third goal was to gauge the yield of new plant harvests and the sale of such products at the market. We faced difficulty in accomplishing this goal measure within the timeline of this grant. Due to delays in finding the best varieties of viable bananas for Louisiana’s climate planting was delayed. Additional uncontrollable acts of God such as the drought in May, June and July, and Hurricane Isaac in August, fruit was not ready for harvest before the end of the grant period. Since the fruit will not be harvested until 2013 surveys to determine actual yield will be conducted later in 2013. Similarly, we had intended to capture financial data from sales of product during the grant period. However, we will conduct quantitative analysis of yield and future sales after the grant period. After conducting site visits and speaking with the farmers we are confident this goal target will be achieved.

Below are timelines of other project activities planned and accomplished.

Goals for the project	Achievements	Date
Select agronomist	Selected and contracted	5/11
Assemble and print educational materials	Assembled, purchased and printed	3/12
Purchase starter plants	Plants purchased	12/11
Conduct workshop 1	Conducted one-on-one technical assistance workshop during starter plant pick-up for all growers	4/12
Plant banana groves	7 growers have planted bananas	4/12
Write, publish marketing materials for consumers	Fliers and postcards created	7/12
Monitor product growth	Progress monitored through phone calls and site visits	7/12-9/12
Write, book radio spots	Radio spots written	7/12
Conduct workshop 2: Post-harvest and marketing	Will be conducted moving forward because of delays due to drought & Hurricane Isaac	8/12-future

Conduct radio/print promotions	Radio spots aired	7/12-8/12
Stage bananas event at market	Event held August 4, 2012	8/12
Conduct farmer surveys to determine yield, sales	Will be conducted moving forward because of delays due to drought & Hurricane Isaac	2013-future

**Beneficiaries**

We successfully engaged in a cost-share program with seven Louisiana farmers to grow an experimental selection of banana trees for the purpose of harvesting fruit for sale at the Crescent City Farmers Market directly to consumers (who already have expressed desire to purchase edible bananas). With inbuilt demand for the products, the risk involved with bananas is in the planting, harvest and post-harvest handling. Even before product arrives at market, consumers have benefited with information about banana varieties that will be available and with knowledge about how to grow their own (backyard bananas).

For participating farmers, their plants will yield fruit for (7) of the next (10) years. Long-term benefits will give each farmer a greater diversity of products (i.e., bananas) to sell directly during the time of the season in which demand for specialty crops outstrips supply (i.e., early autumn). Each bunch of bananas contains approximately 20 fruits. Each banana tree (and/or including subsequent suckers) yields between (3) and (20) bunches each year. In other words, this small Specialty Crop investment will help to yield additional income for farmers for years to come.

**Lessons Learned**

After a delayed start date due to difficulties identifying a source for bananas that will hopefully thrive in our local growing climate and experts who could assist our growers, further delays were caused by the threat of drought. Growers were weary of planting new trees in less than ideal conditions. For these reasons, some growers purchased fewer trees than we originally anticipated. 104 plants were purchased and planted. Later in the summer, several growers’ groves were damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Isaac. We’re currently assessing this damage. Plants pre-purchased by marketumbrella.org, but not yet planted by growers, will be used to replace any plants lost as a result of drought and Hurricane Isaac.

With assistance from our tropical fruit growing experts, seven varieties were selected. We reserved enough plants to meet the goals of the original proposal. Drought contributed to delays originally caused by our variety selection conundrum. In finding Stokes Tropicals in New Iberia, LA, we were able to orchestrate the winterizing of the bananas during cold months in southern Florida to avert freezing temperatures. We had no way of knowing that instead the 2011/12 winter would be so mild in Louisiana. We could have risked it, but instead the plants we are distributing to farmers have a head start on the growing season.

Some growers did not have space to accommodate as many plants as we originally proposed. As a result, we had extra plants reserved. These plants served as replacements for those lost in Hurricane Isaac. We will continue to monitor their growth, yield and challenges after the close of this grant.

Due to drought and Hurricane Isaac, banana production and harvest have been delayed. The growers we recruited and trained remain committed to this project and to bringing the different varieties of bananas we identified to market. We will continue to work with growers to provide harvesting and marketing technical assistance.

The selected banana starter plants were less expensive than budgeted. Some growers also elected to purchase fewer plants than we originally promoted due to less than optimal growing conditions during the time when the plants were made available. The surplus plants allowed us to replace plants lost in Hurricane Isaac and help ensure the future success of this project. These surplus plants were by chance, but we learned that it would be wise to allow for some extra plants in the planning process just in case unforeseen circumstances occur.

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## **CONSUMER AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE BUYING FRESH LOCAL SPECIALTY CROP PRODUCE**

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### **Project Summary**

This project developed and constructed a rolling billboard to promote and encourage consumers to eat fresh, local specialty crop produce at fairs and festivals as well as other venues throughout Louisiana. The rolling billboard campaign project was developed to increase public awareness of the nutritional value of enjoying fresh, great tasting specialty crops and their availability, thereby increasing purchasing and sales.

The rising costs of radio, print, and commercial advertising has continued to increase over recent years. This makes it extremely hard to gain market saturation of messaging with limited dollars. The development and implementation of this project provided LDAF the opportunity to reach consumers in mass numbers economically in a new memorable way. With the initial investment to construct the rolling billboard frame, the advertising message can be utilized over and over for many years.

### **Project Approach**

This project started with the building of a removable frame to fit a 32 foot trailer owned by LDAF. The removable frame allowed LDAF to use the trailer as a rolling billboard for events detailed in this project and, when not in use, the rolling billboard frame is housed, protected from the elements until the next event.

LDAF worked with an ad agency to develop messaging and design ideas for the rolling billboard. Several attempts to finalize the design were made with the initial artist, but due to quote increases and time delays, it was determined we needed to find an alternative builder. LDAF determined that it would be more economical and less time consuming to design messaging and artwork to graphically vinyl wrap the wooden rolling billboard frame.

LDAF staff purchased materials and constructed the 32 foot removable wooden frame that was wrapped with the promotion campaign design and messaging. LDAF staff scheduled parades to participate in to reach consumers with our message.

During this process, it was determined that since the message was to eat healthy, fresh specialty crop produce, when it was possible to purchase fresh produce in season, we would pass out Louisiana satsumas. During other times of the year pass-outs designed with our messaging and website information was distributed. This was overwhelmingly received by the public. We also received several news features in local papers by choosing this novel idea.

LDAF staff worked with local officials to compile data on the attendance rates of each event to measure and report on the public reach of the awareness campaign.

### **Goals and Outcomes Achieved**

The objective of the program was to design and develop a rolling billboard frame with messaging to create consumer awareness and promote consumption of Louisiana specialty crops. This was accomplished.

There were two main goals for this project. The first goal was to attend at least five fair or festival parades utilizing the rolling billboard to reach the consuming public with the awareness campaign message, thereby increasing demand of Louisiana specialty crop produce. The target was met and exceeded with the attendance of and participation in six events. Parades/festivals attended were the Washington Parish Fair, Denham Springs Christmas, Kentwood Mardi Gras, Strawberry Festival, Livingston Parish Fair, and Louisiana Pecan Festival.

The second goal was to reach more than 100,000 people with the awareness campaign message that fresh and healthy specialty crops are available and encourage them to purchase. The target was met and exceeded with the more than 148,000 reached. We deem this project a tremendous success.

### **Beneficiaries**

This project benefited all specialty crop producers in Louisiana as consumer awareness was increased. Louisiana's 3,223 vegetable farmers, 85 sweet potato farmers, 272 citrus growers and other numerous strawberry, watermelon, fig, blackberry, blueberry, and peach producers. Louisiana consumers exposed to the promotion efforts and educational information related to consuming fresh specialty crop produce benefited. More than 148,000 were directly reached at events with countless other extended family members being impacted by the exposure the consumer awareness messaging acquired by their family members, by additional free media coverage and also through access to the LouisianaGrown.com website.

### **Lessons Learned**

We learned that this project created an extreme amount of buzz. Extra free media coverage was realized due to this novel promotional technique. Social media coverage of the rolling billboard and our messaging was posted throughout several different venues. We learned to capitalize on the interest of this novel idea and garnered additional opportunities to gain exposure to the consuming public at no cost.

We also learned that when planning a budget to include dollars to cover entry fees for the events. Very few events have free entry. We also learned that this type of project is more time consuming than just placing an ad in a newspaper, on a stationary billboard or on the radio, but in this venue the public has the opportunity to speak with staff in person and obtain additional information. We also determined that we wanted to expand our measuring methods. The website information is included on all promotional items and on the rolling billboard as well. In the future we plan to monitor website hits after each event and compare those results to prior and post week results to measure traffic. This will help us determine if after seeing our message consumers follow up and additionally check out the site and its informational content as a result of the project activity.

### **Additional Information**

#### Rolling Billboard







Pass Outs



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